

crisis in the high school in my State's capital caused us, that every one of us who felt as I did envied Atlanta because it had a mayor and business leaders who said they were determined to be known as the city too busy to hate. And they gave us, all of us, Martin Luther King and John Lewis, and leaders like Andy Young and Maynard Jackson and so many more, too many to mention. It was fitting that a son of the South who braved the storms of segregation would come home to the most important baseball record of all and go indelibly into the mind and heart of America.

I came here tonight as a baseball fan, to remember a golden moment. I came as a friend, to thank a person who was there for me when I needed him in the worst way. I came here as President, to honor a great American—for courage and decency and dignity, for caring about all the kids coming along behind him, for giving them a chance to chase those dreams. America is a land of dreamers. Hank Aaron has made it even more so.

So Hank and Billye, we thank you for the path you blazed, for the voices you raised, for the helping hands you gave. We thank you. God bless you. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Now, don't sit down. I almost forgot my exit line. *[Laughter]* Ladies and gentlemen, our honoree, on the 25th anniversary of his 40th birthday and his 715th home run, Henry Aaron.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 p.m. in the Centennial Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to W. Thomas Johnson, chairman, president, and chief executive officer, Cable News Network; Ted Turner, vice chairman, and Gerald M. Levin, chairman and chief executive officer, Time Warner, Inc.; Gov. Roy E. Barnes and former Gov. Zell Miller of Georgia; Mayor Bill Campbell and former Mayors Andrew Young, Ivan Allen Jr., and Maynard Jackson of Atlanta; Mr. Aaron's wife, Billye; and Mr. Turner's wife, actress Jane Fonda. The President also referred to the South Atlantic (Sally) League. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

February 6, 1999

Good morning. Six years ago I determined Washington had to get off the sidelines and join the frontlines in the fight against crime. I committed my administration to recovering our streets from violence, to reclaiming our neighborhoods as safe havens for families. Since then we've pursued a new strategy of law enforcement based not on tough talk but on tougher penalties, better prevention, and the substantial, visible presence of community police.

This strategy is showing remarkable results. Since 1993, crime rates in America have fallen to the lowest point in a quarter century. Property crime is down. Violent crime has dropped 20 percent in the last 6 years. The murder rate is the lowest in 30 years. Americans can take pride in streets that are safer, but mostly they can take comfort in lives that are more secure.

There are many reasons that crime is in a sharp decline. Chief among them is our growing ability to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Gun-related crime is on the wane, and it's no wonder. According to a recent report by the Justice Department, the background checks we required in the Brady law have put a stop to nearly a quarter-million handgun purchases. Thanks to Brady, we turn away more than 200 felons a day, sending them home empty handed instead of well-armed. And now that the instacheck system is in effect, we can conduct these checks in even less time. Retail gun stores, sporting goods stores, licensed gun dealers: They're all working to keep guns out of the hands of felons and fugitives.

But there's a loophole in the law, and criminals know how to exploit it. They go to gun shows. Last year there were more than 4,400 gun shows all across America. I come from a State where these shows are very popular. I have visited and enjoyed them over the years. I know they're the first place where many parents teach their children how to handle firearms safely.

But at the same time, at too many gun shows, criminals are buying guns with no

questions asked. That's because the law permits some sellers—one-quarter to one-half of the vendors at a typical gun show—to skip the background checks required by Brady. That is a significant loophole. It's wide enough that criminals reach right through it, grabbing, collectively, thousands of firearms that disappear without a trace.

Last fall I asked the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General to report on the problem and to come up with solutions. I now have their report. It is sensible and sobering. It shows conclusively that gun shows are a forum for gun traffickers, a cash-and-carry convenience store for weapons used to maim and kill.

We must close this loophole. America cannot allow its gun shows to become illegal arms bazaars, where lawbreakers shop side-by-side with the law-abiding. That's why I strongly support the recommendations of Secretary Rubin and Attorney General Reno. We should extend Brady checks and gun-tracing records to any and all open markets where large numbers of firearms are sold. And we should vigorously and fairly enforce the rules. The gun lobby may not want to hear this, but clearly it's the right thing to do.

No background check, no gun. No exceptions.

To toughen enforcement of the existing law, my balanced budget includes new funds to hire more than 100 agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. These agents will help arrest violent criminals and gun traffickers, and will shut down illegal purchases of firearms. My budget also increases funding for firearms prosecutions and expands our successful efforts to keep guns out of the hands of violent youth.

In these efforts, I am thankful for the leadership of Senator Lautenberg, and Congressman Blagojevich, who will introduce legislation to make this gun show policy the law of the land. I'm joined today by Senator Lautenberg, along with Senator Dick Durbin from Illinois, and Congresswomen Julia Carson from Indiana, as well as Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder. I thank them all for their support.

I'm looking forward to working with members of both parties in the coming months,

so that together we can strengthen the laws that serve us so well, and in doing so, build a stronger America for the 21st century.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:05 p.m. on February 5 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on Assistance to Jordan

February 6, 1999

At this difficult time, my thoughts and prayers, as well as those of all Americans, are with His Majesty King Hussein, his family, and the people of Jordan. The United States stands by Jordan and is determined to do all that it can to support and strengthen it.

Next week I will ask Congress promptly to provide the \$300 million in supplemental bilateral assistance to Jordan that was promised as part of the Wye agreement.

The United States is working with the international community to mobilize additional resources to help Jordan maintain its economic stability. We are consulting with key allies, including our G-7 partners and the Gulf States, on further steps to support Jordan.

The International Monetary Fund will play a leading role in marshaling international support for Jordan. Substantial resources can be mobilized quickly under a new IMF program with expedited procedures.

The World Bank also is preparing to provide additional support for Jordan's economic reform program.

In addition, the United States will support substantial rescheduling of Jordan's obligations to bilateral creditors through the Paris Club on the basis of an IMF program.

These initiatives by the international community, combined with U.S. direct bilateral assistance, will provide substantial resources in support of Jordanian economic stability and growth.